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AUTHOR Mavrogenes, Nancy A., Ed.
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ABSTRACT

Four responses to speeches regarding William S. Gray presented at the May 9, 1985, Annual Convention of the International Reading Association (IRA) are presented in this paper. Gray--whose accomplishments include his association with the University of Chicago from 1912 (student) to his death in 1960 (Professor Emeritus); his pioneering work in the use of standardized reading tests, diagnostic theory, and remedial procedures; his promotion of adult reading and content area reading as subspecialties of reading; and the famous Scott Foresman Dick and Jane basal readers--is remembered by Nancy Larrick, Ralph C. Staiger, Theodore L. Harris, and Albert J. Harris. Larrick speaks of her affiliation with Gray during the formative years of the IRA and gratefully acknowledges his sensitive and gracious guidance, without which there would have been no IRA. Staiger mentions Gray's vast intellectual and physical energy, his humility and his generosity with his time, money, and expertise. T.L. Harris discusses Gray's work in the area of reading research, mentioning his interest in maintaining a close connection between theory and practice, his sense of history, and the seriousness of purpose he brought to the field due to his methodological, objective, and scholarly approach. A. J. Harris comments that Gray influenced many serious students of reading beyond Illinois through his comprehensive scholarship and intellectual leadership. (LLZ)

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IN MEMORY OF WILLIAM S. GRAY: REMARKS AT THE READING HALL OF FAME'S GRAY CENTENNIAL PROGRAM, 1985

Nancy A. Mavrogenes, editor

Department of Research and Evaluation

Chicago Board of Education

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IN MEMORY OF WILLIAM S. GRAY: REMARKS AT THE READING HALL OF FAME'S GRAY CENTENNIAL PROGRAM, 1985

The Reading Hall of Fame meeting, May 9, 1985, at the International Reading Association's Annual Convention, celebrated the 100th anniversary of the birth of William S. Gray. This celebration honored Gray's extensive contributions to the field of reading. Associated with the University of Chicago from student in 1912 to Professor Emeritus at the time of his death in 1960, Gray published almost 400 articles and books on reading alone, as well as over 100 more on other aspects of education. He constructed the first widely used standardized test in reading in 1915, developed diagnostic theory and remedial procedures in the 1920's, summarized reading research annually beginning in 1925, produced the famous Dick and Jane basal readers for Scott Foresman beginning in 1930, promoted adult reading and content area instruction into sub-specialties of reading, chaired the committees that produced three influential yearbooks on reading for the National Society for the Study of Education (1925, 1937, 1948), authored the articles on reading for three Encyclopedias of Educational Research (1941, 1950, 1960), organized the University of Chicago Annual Reading Conferences and edited their Proceedings from 1938 to 1952, surveyed the international teaching of reading and writing for UNESCO in the 1950's, and devised the famous "skills model" of reading which formed the basis of American reading instruction for decades (Mavrogenes, 1985).

At the Reading Hall of Fame meeting, members of the organization were invited to be commenters on the two speeches, "William S. Gray: The Person" by Nancy A. Mavrogenes and "William S. Gray: The Scholar" by Helen M. Robinson (Stevenson, 1985). Because these comments explored the qualities and

legacies of Gray's work and of the man himself, they are offered here as part of the public record of the history of reading. Nancy Larrick, Ralph C. Staiger, Theodore L. Harris, and Albert J. Harris presented personal reminiscences and insights revealing the precision, humility, vigor, breadth, foresight, and thoughtfulness which enabled William S. Gray to become the preeminent reading educator and thus an important influence in twentieth century American education.

NANCY LARRICK

My friendship with Dr. Gray got off to a late start, but he has a lasting and very warm place in my memory. Because I came up through a liberal arts college, without benefit of Education with a capital E, I began teaching in junior high school instead of elementary school. So I never heard of Dick and Jane, the Scott Foresman basal readers, reading tests and test scores, or Dr. William S. Gray until I was plunged in the reading field as an editor of a series of new weekly magazines.

At a conference I had met Dr. Nila B. Smith, new president of the International Council for the Improvement of Reading Instruction (ICIRI), who invited me to become editor of the newsletter which later grew into The Reading Teacher. A great honor, but where to begin? I was in desperate need of articles for this struggling little publication so I sent off letters to half a dozen of the big names in the ICIRI membership, asking each one to write a short article on a specified subject. Now I am appalled at my audacity, for these were extremely busy and important people, only one or two of whom I had even met. But every one came through promptly and with the utmost graciousness, including Dr. William. S. Gray. In addition to a very useful article, he wrote a warm and encouraging letter which I must have read

a dozen times. It helped keep me afloat in what, at times, seemed to be a rough sea.

As we met on the ICIRI board and, later, on the board of the International Reading Association, I came to realize that this first introduction to Dr. Gray would set a pattern. For he was always responsive, always prompt and precise, always thoughtful and caring. But as we struggled in the early years to merge the two parent organizations--the ICIRI and the NART (National Association for Remedial Teaching)--into the International Reading Association (IRA), I found we had a relentless and indomitable steam roller in our first president, Dr. William S. Gray. Without raising his voice, without a harsh word or any sign of politicking, he pushed through decisions that left us gasping ... and later very proud.

The new organization came into being in January of 1956. At the first board meeting, Dr. Gray stated that, of course, we must have a national conference in the spring--less than four months away. It should be in Chicago, he said, where he had determined that the old Hotel Morrison would be available. He would arrange the program and his University of Chicago colleagues would handle the conference mechanics. We were stunned.

All of us knew that our tiny office at the University of Pittsburgh was almost submerged by the mere mechanics of trying to merge two organizations, weed out duplications in membership, and get the magazines out on time to the right names.

"We better wait until next year," we argued. "Let's get our house in order first!" We talked to deaf ears. The conference would be at the Hotel Morrison May 11 and 12. Dr. Gray would handle all conference details.

And, of course, the proceedings of the conference must be published, continued Dr. Gray. "Nancy and I will edit the papers." So we did publish

the proceedings, with the support of Scholastic Magazines, and followed that pattern for many years.

I learned a great deal from Dr. Gray at that first conference. He had decided that I, as president-elect, should preside at the final general session at which he would give a report on the infant organization. That seemed simple enough, but he was not a person to take any chances on the details of his master plan. So we sat down together to go over the luncheon program. "I find it is well to write out an introduction," he said in his precise way. I got the point and promised to be properly prepared. And, do you know, that ever since that time I have always written out any introduction I am asked to make.

As for the proceedings which we were to edit together, he said his part would be done by one of his researchers who would first check every footnote given in the various papers. "But these are all scholarly people," I protested.

"Yes," he said, "they are the very ones we need to be most careful about. You'll see," he added with a wry smile. And he was right. His researcher found dozens of errors made by some of our most distinguished speakers. Several even misquoted their own work with very unscholarly abandon!

Although the two parent organizations had each brought a small bank balance to the treasury of the IRA, we were running in the red by the end of Dr. Gray's term of office, thanks to the complications of mailing lists, publications, etc. This was distressing to Dr. Gray, and he insisted that he should give us the money to bail us out. There should be no red ink on the books at the end of his term of office! But that time Dr. Gray did not prevail. We talked him out of this generous offer by noting that it was a bad precedent for future presidents to have to live up to.

When I became president in July 1956, I was deeply concerned over my job of planning the content of the program for the Second Annual Conference to be held in New York in May 1957. My professional world was in children's literature, specifically trade books for children. Members of the IRA Board and the great majority of the members of the organization were textbook-oriented. How could I come up with a program that would please and challenge such diverse interests?

As though sensing my anxiety, Dr. Gray brought up the subject of the program one day as we walked from Random House toward Fifth Avenue. "This is the opportunity for you to bring in your special contacts in the children's book world right here in New York," he said. "You must put your mark on the program."

So, thanks to encouragement from Dr. Gray, we had the first book-and-author luncheon (with two authors and two artists on the program!). We had a storytelling session with a busload of children coming in from Manhasset. We had a group of teenagers telling Ruth Strang what they did or did not like about reading (they didn't like the textbooks at all!). And much more. I am sure I would never have had the courage to go so far but for that encouragement from Dr. Gray.

Those of you who knew Dr. Gray remember that he had a passion for detail. Just as no footnote was too slight to be questioned and corrected, no drugstore coffee-check was too small to be recorded at once in his little black expense book. This was like breathing in and breathing out to him.

In those early days of the IRA, there were thousands of petty details calling out for attention--mailing list errors, membership cards mixed up, letters of complaint, a precarious lack of petty cash. To some of us their cries for immediate attention seemed to be overwhelming. But they did not

divert Dr. Gray from the big decisions: to go ahead with the First National Conference with less than four months to produce it and to publish the proceedings with his own scholarly check to assure excellence. And as that first conference was winding down, he was looking ahead to the next conference and seeing ways to enrich that program.

All the while he was sensitive to the needs and concerns of individuals all around him. I feel very lucky to have been one of those individuals. Now, almost 30 years later, I can say with assurance that just as IRA owes its very being to Dr. William S. Gray, those who worked with him continue to reflect his influence.

RALPLH C. STAIGER

One of my indelible memories is the sight of William S. Gray being boosted onto a table after a luncheon at the second IRA convention, which was held in the New Yorker Hotel. He had just been awarded the Citation of Merit, and everyone wanted to see him as he accepted the award. The reason I remember this so vividly, I suspect, is that Mr. Gray was decorous almost to a fault. The sight of him balancing on what is known in the hotel trade as a "deuce" was completely out of character for him.

William Gray could outwalk anyone half his age. At Atlantic City, when we walked from one session of a meeting to another, he always led the pack. He led intellectually as well as physically. It is fitting that the annual IRA Citation of Merit has been named after him. He wrote the best-seller of all UNESCO-published books, <u>The Teaching of Reading and Writing</u>. The UNESCO staff members who first discussed the book with him, after he had flown all night from Chicago to Paris, were amazed that he kept them asking questions,

and answered their questions until late the next night. He was almost 70 at the time.

Once, in the 1950's, I met him at the Jackson airport to take him to the University of Southern Mississippi, where we were to have a reading conference. On the way, we passed the Piney Woods School. He asked to visit, because, he said, its fund-raising had been criticised by some of his colleagues. This was soon after its principal, Dr. Laurence Jones, had been on a television show and the host had asked everyone listening to send a dollar to the school, which was in fact doing an excellent job with students who would otherwise not have received an education.

We went to the library, and he headed directly for the card catalog. Quickly he looked up his entries, and said to the librarian, "I'll send you some missing books when I get home." He also said that he would straighten out his colleagues about the worthiness of the Piney Woods School, and that he would tell Mrs. Gray, who handled his charitable gifts, to remember them.

I like to recommend some of his books to young scholars, who now know him only as a name. He and Bernice Rogers wrote Maturity in Reading in 1956. When I received it, I took it to Ithaca, New York, where I was to attend a conference at Cornell hosted by the State Education Department. I took it to bed and spent the entire night reading it. It was that interesting a research study! I recommend it to broaden a researcher's view of reading, for it tells of the search to find truly expert and accomplished readers.

He once told me that when Helen Robinson was working on her dissertation, he derived a great deal of pleasure, as her advisor, from observing the medical men who were consultants as she collected data for the classic Why Children Fail in Reading. He enjoyed the way they thought--the ways in which

they dealt with problems, which he thought were quite different from educators' approaches.

One last story about William S. Gray. I was in Boston when he was invited to give the Burton Lecture at Harvard. It was entitled The Teaching of Reading: An International View. I read that he was to lecture at Harvard in the newspaper, and I was in the audience on the appointed evening. After his talk, I went on stage to congratulate him, and he said, "I saw you in the audience, but you were out of context here in Boston, and I spent half the lecture trying to identify you!" He was truly a human Giant, to remember a young colleague far from home.

THEODORE L. HARRIS

At the time I knew Mr. Gray as one of his students in the latter 30's and early 40's, he was responsible at the University of Chicago for the field of teacher education as a field of study as well as for much of the work in the field of reading. He thus maintained a close liaison between the theory and practice of reading and the practical concerns of teachers and administrators. This is evident in much of the action research orientation in many of his studies. It is also revealed in the latter sections of those studies in which he invariably considered the implications for educational practice and indicated the nature and direction of further needed research. He expected his students to do the same.

It is in this reaching out for practical implications and for research needs that we find one of the major qualities of Mr. Gray's research and teaching--an open, inquiring mind. He firmly believed that there was always room for improvement in educational concepts, materials, and methods. His scholarly orientation was very broad. It encompassed, for example, a number

of investigative techniques, as the range of his approaches indicate: they varied from individual case studies to national surveys, and from test-building to theorizing about the concept of the reading process. The breadth of his research interests is further illustrated by his investigations and those of his colleague, Helen Robinson, in research which firmly established the concept of the multiple causation of reading difficulties.

A further dimension of his inquiring mind was a highly developed sense of historicity. This of course was very evident in such a series of summaries of research as his long-continued Summary of Investigations in Reading. It was also evident in the command of background information he expected of all his students. I recall writing a 100 page plus summary of research in the fields of psychology and physiology that was relevant, from Javal on, merely as a preliminary study of the topic I had chosen for my dissertation. Since Mr. Gray's interests in reading encompassed these fields as well as the pedagogy of reading and the sociology of reading, he combined the dimensions of breadth and historical depth which gave him an impressive command of the parameters of the field of reading.

Mr. Gray also brought to the study of reading a seriousness of purpose that was implemented by habits of thought that were methodical, thorough, and consistent. This is evident in the care with which individual studies were planned and executed. It is also revealed in the patterns of his research and writing. One recurring theme which has been commented upon was his continued attention to, and his expansion of, the concept of the reading process. A further major continuing focus was upon a developmental concept of reading. He firmly believed that a person has the capacity for the growth and refinement of reading interests, tastes, and habits throughout life. This conception was particularly evidenced by his investigations of adult reading

interests and habits and by his efforts to continue attention to the teaching of reading beyond the elementary school level.

In all of his scholarly endeavors and in his teaching, there is evidence of an objective, judicial temperament and a reflective turn of mind. In addition to these traits, he possessed a certain humbleness, never arrogance. I vividly recall a small seminar in secondary school reading--one of the first of its kind--taught by Paul Diederich. Both Mr. Gray and I participated in it. We were handed a very abstruse poem by Charles Kingsley and asked for our interpretation of it. While I, a former English major, had considerable difficulty with it, Mr. Gray was absolutely stumped. He said, "I completely fail to understand it. I have spent so much of my life reading about reading that I have not found time to read to understand and enjoy poetry." Not many distinguished professors I have known would have put themselves in this situation and made such a confession.

ALBERT J. HARRIS

When I read the paper by Dr. Robinson, I was impressed by its systematic and logical order. As I thought about it, it occurred to me that the paper is evidence of the way in which Dr. Gray imprinted his own intellectual style upon his students. Dr. Robinson managed to keep herself out of the paper, but its careful organization is similar in style to what Dr. Gray might have written.

A large part of Dr. Gray's influence came from the excellent students he attracted to the University of Chicago and the example that he provided them. Scores of his students over a span of forty years went on to positions of senior responsibility both in universities and in school systems. A few, like Dr. Robinson, have made major contributions to reading research.

Dr. Gray's strong influence was not confined to his University of Chicago students. I am a good example of the way in which Dr. Gray's influence as a scholar reached far beyond Illinois. When I became interested in reading, in the 1930's, I tried to catch up with what was already known about reading and reading instruction. Dr. Gray's summaries were invaluable in calling my attention to major studies I might have overlooked. In addition, wherever I turned in my reading, Dr. Gray had been there before me. I tried to profit from his example of what a scholar in the field of reading could be.

I am sure that there must be many others who never studied under Dr. Gray but who were profoundly influenced by his comprehensive scholarship and intellectual leadership. The tradition that he began is being carried on today by the students of his students and the disciples of his disciples. It is high time that we recognize his great contributions to people in the field of reading as well as to knowledge about reading.

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